

The Paschal Letter of Alexander II, Patriarch of Alexandria: A Greek Defense of Coptic Theology under Arab Rule

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Berlin papyrus 10677 is the palaeographers' delight. The opulent, hypnotically regular hand in which it is written has become the type example of Alexandrian majuscule¹ "de type copte."² It is discussed in every standard handbook of Greek palaeography.³ And yet the content of this more than five-meter-long document has not been analyzed by historians of the Egyptian Church and of the late antique Mediterranean since its publication in 1910.⁴

This imposing, physically impressive document can be precisely dated to one of three possible years in the first quarter of the eighth century. The terminus post quem is given by the partially preserved outer column, bearing a bilingual Greek/Arabic protocol that gives the formula

ἐν ὀνόματι τ[ο]ῦ Θ(εο)ῦ [τοῦ ἑλεημόνου]
καὶ φιλανθρ[ώπου],
[b^cismil]lāh ar-ra[hmān ar-raḥīm],

¹As in G. Cavallo, "Grammata Alexandrina," *JÖB* 24 (1975), 23–54; cf. S. Bernardinello, "Cronologia della maiuscola greca di tipo alessandrino," *Scriptorium* 32 (1978), 251–55.

²J. Irigoin, "L'onciale grecque de type copte," *JÖB* 8 (1959), 29–51.

³From V. Gardthausen, *Griechische Paläographie*, II (Leipzig, 1913), 250, cf. 104, to, most recently, G. Cavallo and H. Maehler, *Greek Bookhands of the Early Byzantine Period, A.D. 300–800* (London, 1987), 114. See also W. Schubart, *Papyri Graecae Bero-linenses* (Bonn, 1911), no. 50; and R. Seider, *Paläographie der griechischen Papyri*, II (Stuttgart, 1970), no. 66 (pp. 168–69 with pl. 36).

⁴The *editio princeps* is by C. Schmidt and W. Schubart, *Berliner Klassikertexte*, VI (Berlin, 1910), no. 5, pp. 55–109 with pls. 1–2 (hereafter SS). The papyrus was bought in Akhmim in 1905; it had been found in the place of the letter's destination, the White Monastery of Shenoute at Sohag, across the Nile from Akhmim, the literary contents of whose library are scattered among many collections in the West. P. Batiffol in *Bulletin d'ancienne littérature et archéologie chrétienne* 1 (1911), 221–23, contented himself with remarking that the text, which he in part summarizes, amounts to "monophysisme Sévérien" (p. 223). Cf. J. van Haelst, *Catalogue des papyrus littéraires juifs et chrétiens* (Paris, 1976), no. 621 (p. 221).

οὐκ ἔ[στι]ν θ(ε)δ[ος] εἰ μὴ [ὁ θεδ[ος] μόνος],
Μααμετ ἀπόστ[ολος] θ(ε)δ[ος],
[lā illaha illa Allāh waḥī]dun, Muḥammad [rasūl
Allāh].⁵

This feature does not appear in the chancery practice of Arab-ruled Egypt, in the designation of official manufacture of the writing material, until it was introduced by the caliph Mo'awiya in the 670s and mandated by the caliph 'Abd al-Malik in A.D. 698.⁶ Then, thanks to the preservation of the final columns (of a total of eleven) that were innermost when the roll was rolled up, we have the date of Easter being announced: 16 April. Easter Sunday fell on this day in A.D. 713, 719, and 724, before the elimination of bilingual protocols and their replacement by completely Arabic ones in Egyptian chancery documents in A.D. 733.⁷ Thus the papyrus can be dated to the first month and a half (the Lenten fast is to begin in February) of either 713, 719, or 724. Ordinarily 724, a leap year, would seem to be ruled out by the correspondence of Mecheir 26, the date given for beginning the eight weeks' fast, with 20 February (to be 21 in a leap year).⁸ This, however, is not necessarily the case;⁹ a leap year did not have to add an extra day to the

⁵SS, pp. 61.

⁶Cavallo and Maehler, *Bookhands*, p. 114 (no. 52a); cf. SS p. 93.

⁷SS, p. 94.

⁸Bernardinello "Cronologia," 253, repeated by Cavallo and Maehler, *Bookhands*, *ibid.*; cf. the table in R. S. Bagnall and K. A. Worp, *The Chronological Systems of Byzantine Egypt* (Zutphen, 1978), 98. The other correspondences are the beginning of Holy Week (i.e., Monday of Holy Week) as Pharmouthi 15 = 10 April, and Holy Saturday as Pharmouthi 20 = 15 April. I am grateful to Roger Bagnall and Klaas Worp for discussing points of the chronology.

⁹S. Bernardinello, "Nuove prospettive sulla cronologia del Pap.Grenf. II 112," *Scriptorium* 34 (1980), 239–40. The point is that the scribe could have made, and I think here did make, a mistake, by omitting an alpha.

days before Julian 29 February. Thus 724 remains a possibility. No indiction number survives; the years in question were an 11th, a 2nd, and a 7th indiction respectively. But internal evidence can help in narrowing down the date, as will be seen.

The non-Chalcedonian Coptic patriarch of Alexandria during those years was Alexander II (reigned 705–730). His patriarchate coincided with momentous events in the age of transition from a Byzantine-Coptic to an Islamic-dominated society in Egypt. Alexander II is the subject of an extensive biography in the Arabic-language compilation *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria*,¹⁰ formerly attributed to Severus of Ashmunein (fl. A.D. 955–987).¹¹ Even in the later form in which we have it, this Life, originally doubtless written in Coptic but transmitted in Arabic translation,¹² in-

tersects at several points of interest with the material that comes from the patriarch's own hand as contained in his paschal letter.

After the protocol, fragments of the address have also been preserved; legible in both Coptic-style uncials and the tall, impressive Greek chancery lettering is the name Γενναθῶ, "To Gennadius" (spelled with the fricative to be expected in eighth-century pronunciation). His title, visible in the line of uncials, appears as πρῶτ, restored by Schmidt and Schubart as πρωτοπρεσβύτερος (–τέρω), but surely more correctly understood as προεστώς,¹³ monastic superior, the correct form of address for the head of Shenoute's monastery.¹⁴ We thus know that the holder of this important monastic office in the Egyptian church in the early eighth century bore the Byzantine name of Gennadius. This is a worthwhile addition to the list of known superiors of the "Deir al-Abyad" in late antiquity and the Middle Ages.¹⁵ Since the abbot Gennadius was the addressee of the patriarch's paschal letter, he must have functioned as the disseminator of important ecclesiastical information, such as the date of Easter, for Upper Egypt.

The paschal letter is written in Greek prose of the high style, with long compound-complex sentences, many dependent clauses constructed with

¹⁰Ed. B. Evetts, PO 5 (Paris, 1947), 48–83 (hereafter Evetts). Also necessary for the *sira* (Life) of Alexander are the editions of the earlier part of the *History of the Patriarchs* by C. F. Seybold: the "vulgate" text in the CSCO (Beirut-Paris-Leipzig, 1904–10), and the earlier recension from the Hamburg ms. of A.D. 1266 (Hamburg, 1912).

¹¹The recent pathbreaking research of D. W. Johnson of Catholic University (Johnson, "Further Remarks on the Arabic History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria," OC 61 [1977], 103–16) and J. den Heijer of the Netherlands Institute in Cairo and the University of Leiden has shown that Severus had in fact little to do with the compilation that has come down under his name. See J. den Heijer, "Sawirus Ibn al-Muqaffā', Mawhūb Ibn Manšūr Ibn Mufarrig' et la genèse de l'Histoire des Patriarches d'Alexandrie," BO 41 (1984), 336–47; idem, "L'Histoire des Patriarches d'Alexandrie: Recension primitive et vulgate," BSAC 27 (1985), 1–29; idem, "Mawhūb ibn Manšūr ibn Mufarrig' et l'Histoire des Patriarches d'Alexandrie: Notes sur une étude en cours," in OCA 226 (Rome, 1986), 143–57. For social and political background to the HP, see M. Martin, "Une lecture de l'Histoire des Patriarches d'Alexandrie," POC 35 (1985), 15–36.

¹²The earlier (pre-9th-century) biographies in this collection have not been subjected to as much critical analysis as have later lives. This much seems reasonably clear. The lives of the patriarchs prior to Shenoute II (d. A.D. 1044) were redated in their Arabic versions by Mawhūb ibn Mansur beginning in 1088. In a note, Mawhūb stated that the biography of Alexander II had been found at the monastery of St. Theodore at al-Manhā at Iblāg (Johnson, "Further Remarks," 106–7). Mawhūb's collaborator, Michael of Damanhur, is credited with having translated the Coptic material found into Arabic; this is consistent with what we know of the decay of knowledge of the Coptic language by the 11th century and the rise of a consequent era of translation. The findspot may very well be locatable. "Al-Manhā" is the region of the Oxyrhynchite mouth of the Bahr Yusuf, the "Joseph Canal," in Middle Egypt (Yaquut, *Mujma' al-Buldān*, ed. F. Wüstenfeld, IV [Leipzig, 1869], 672). St. Theodore the Strategates was supposed to have been martyred in the Oxyrhynchite (E. O. Winstedt, *Coptic Texts on St. Theodore the General* [Oxford, 1910], 34, 102), and was a popular saint in that area; his feast was observed in the calendar of Oxyrhynchus of A.D. 535/6: *P. Oxy.* XI 1357.63 or 65 (see note ad loc. p. 42). A church of St. Theodore is attested in the Oxyrhynchite in the early 7th century in *P.Princ.* II 87 (A.D. 612). The bishopric of Oxyrhynchus (Pemje, Bahnasa) was still flourishing and overseeing mo-

nastic activity (in this area so famed for monasticism since the 5th century) in the 10th and 11th centuries; see S. Timm, *Das christlich-koptische Ägypten in arabischer Zeit*, I (Wiesbaden, 1984), 284–90, cf. 300 note 49. In the "al-Manhā" area there exists today a Coptic Orthodox church of St. Theodore, reported to be built on the site of still-visible ancient monastic ruins; Timm, *Ägypten*, II (Wiesbaden, 1984), 715; cf. S. Timm, *Christliche Stätten in Ägypten* (Wiesbaden, 1979), 57. This may well be where the Coptic life of Alexander was written. The Arabic place name "Iblāg" is doubtless a corruption of an earlier Greek *epiokion* name, although P. Pruneti, *Centri abitati dell'Ossirinchi* (Florence, 1981) does not appear to provide any leads. (I am grateful to Prof. William H. Willis of Duke University for help on this point.) The life of Alexander was apparently the work of two earlier writers: "George the deacon," syncellus of Patriarch Simon I, who worked during the reign of Anastasius (713–715), and his continuator "John the deacon" (fl. between 744 and 767); Johnson, "Further Remarks," 113.

¹³For προεστώς addressed to the superior of Shenoute's monastery, cf. *P.Cair.Masp.* III 67312.64–65, 96 (A.D. 567). Interchange of *o*/*ω* is common and natural for Coptic speakers and in the Greek of Egypt. See F. Gignac, *Grammar of the Greek Papyri of the Roman and Byzantine Periods*, I (Milan, 1976), 275–77.

¹⁴Also visible before the name "Gennadius" in the line of larger script are what appear to be the letters Η Η Π with a vertical hasta to the left. SS speculated that they came from the titlature of the sender. The double eta suggests a Coptic word, not a Greek; it could be part of ΕΤΤΑ ΙΗΗΥ, "honored," a title applied to the recipient (the pi is not certain), although that word is more usually found in the postpositive position. As the first eta is not certain, it is possible that the word was ΑΡ] ΧΗ-Γ[Ω: ἀρχηγός could also be an abbot's title.

¹⁵See R.-G. Coquin in *BIFAO* 72 (1972) 169–78.

participles and genitives absolute, and intelligently deployed technical theological vocabulary. Clearly this patriarch deserved the reputation in his biography of being “known for wisdom and learning . . . learned in the Scriptures from his youth” (Evetts, p. 49).¹⁶ As might be expected, Patriarch Alexander makes his timely paschal letter into a mini-sermon, as is nearly always the case in this genre. The scriptural texts from which his homiliary exposition springs are very carefully chosen. In keeping with the practice of earlier Egyptian patriarchs in their paschal letters, the texts chosen answer to needs and events of the times, as will be seen from the remarks on individual points below.

The first thing to consider is the complete text of the letter. In the present translation, which follows the Schmidt/Schubart Greek text (see above, note 4), dots indicate where damage to the papyrus has caused loss of text.¹⁷ A typical formulary opening has been supplied as a restoration.

(Alexander, by the grace of God *papa* of the predication of St. Mark, to Gennadius, *proestos* of the venerable house of Shenoute the archimandrite and prophet.

Before the discourse I greet you and I salute the footstool of the feet of your beloved, Christ-loving fatherhood.)

(Christ of our faith, Easter of the calendar is) the cornerstone. . . for it would seem as wrong to neglect the feast of all Christendom as to neglect vir-

tue itself. For this is truly the feast of Christ: to purify the soul and to go up on high and to expect grace from heaven.

The occasion: announcing the date of Easter

See then, that now has come the salvific time of announcing: the time has arrived for signaling with a silver trumpet the pure and clear Word, and for me to name for you the coming day of the feast, so we may delight in the promises of faith, not by just hope or love by itself, but rather by both hope and love together, exalted in hope and practiced in love. And so . . . I am again impelled to begin and am led to proclaim the good news among them, and I summon the divine and intelligible light of knowledge to be given me from above by the Father of lights for my comprehension, illuminating my understanding and fitting my stammering tongue to speak clearly. For every ray of the Gospel is divine and utterly clear and unquenchable: for as we study . . . since God has honored our human race also with reason, (so we) conduct ourselves. Everyone who receives this announcement . . . of good news . . .

Preaching of the apostles

. . . and writings from the Scriptures . . . those who were called out of the whole world taught things that were despised by the high-up, yet wondrous to men themselves, things such that they caused the listeners to marvel and be carried away. So great, too, was the power of their words, by the grace of Him who supplied them, to the listeners, that Greek philosophers and rhetors and those (skilled) in the subtly wrought wisdom of this world were not in any way strong enough to overturn their advantage. So those who seemed to be wise were condemned, and shown up as fools by the simple, who flocked to the preaching from out of the whole world.

And who enacted that these things should be wrought intelligently, yet miraculously, if not He according to His will that loves humankind, my Lord and God, Jesus, who is the eternal Light, more than brilliant, intelligible, substantial, enlightening hearts and illuminating perceptions and flashing upon the understanding, in whom we live and move and have our being? He, then, surpasses every word; all wisdom is from Him and exists in Him eternally, as the Scripture says, and, since through it He operates all things in a manner

¹⁶ He came from the old monastery of the Ennaton, outside Alexandria, which one would have expected to continue as a center of learning even more than sixty years after the Arab conquest. The Ennaton (see Timm, *Ägypten*, II, 833–53, s.v. “Dēr az-Zaggāg”) remained throughout late antiquity a staunch stronghold of Monophysite loyalty and observance, although Justinian tried to persuade the monks to turn Chalcedonian (see *ibid.*, 837 and the evidence cited there; cf. PG 86, cols. 1103–46). On the other hand, the other great Alexandrian house, the Metanoia (cf. *P.Fouad* 86–89), was taken over by the Chalcedonians; see R. Rémondon, “Le monastère alexandrin de la Métanoia était-il bénéficiaire du fisc ou à son service?,” *Studi Volterra* 5 (Milan, 1971), 769–81, and now J. E. Goehring, *Chalcedonian Power Politics and the Demise of Pachomian Monasticism* (Claremont, Calif., 1989), 17–20. Could Alexander’s reference to “the instructive memoranda we have recently given out, especially as regards the thunder of . . . the Theologian” mean that he had written a commentary on John? The phrase διδασκαλικαὶ ὑπομνήσεις could indicate a teaching commentary. None, however, has been preserved in any language under Alexander’s name.

¹⁷ The editors’ indications of biblical quotations and allusions, and of patristic quotations, in SS are taken as given and will not be specifically discussed here. For comparanda on Paschal letters, see J. Quasten, *Patrology*, III (Westminster, Md., 1960), 52;

M. F. A. Brok in *VChr* 5 (1951), 101–10; and on this text *DACL* 3 (1937), 1430–33.

befitting God, He has demonstrated that the poor of this world and those who work with their hands are cleansed of every fleshly grossness, and illuminated in their minds, while to the eyes of flesh here below they are deemed worthy . . . (only of being looked down upon).

. . . We shall demonstrate this to the faithful from the Scriptures. For Jesus, Lord and God, performed healings by deed and word and will, as has already been proven, but He never allowed Himself to work miracles by means of His own shadow. But the shadows of the disciples glorified by Him breathed healing upon the sick, as was accomplished by Peter; and (we find that) touching linen cloths and aprons to (an apostle's) face gave back health to the bystanders, as was allowed to happen in Paul's case. Is it not the utmost to be outstripped by such a gift of miracle? He who surpasses the whole intelligible and perceptible creation was willingly outdone by His disciples and ceded the first prize to them, and was not ashamed to be second to them in wonder-working. And since those chosen by them were deemed worthy of very great and exalted mysteries, and have become like cultivators of salvation in the world for every generation, with good, sweet harvests, we have made an approach to them in the instructive memoranda we have recently given out, especially as regards the thunder of the one among them who enjoys the title of "Theologian." And so, as far as possible, we shall ascend to the heights of his thought, as we have been led to it with awe and miraculously.

Texts: Is God visible or invisible? (John 1:14 and 1:18)

What a marvelous thing he experienced, the one who rested on the Lord's breast and was loved by his Master more than the other disciples. He left us this sole legacy, to understand what divine things he taught. He said: "And the Word was God, and the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory of the Only-Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." And then again after that he prepares us to be greatly astonished and, setting a riddle, brings as it were the opposite formulation to perplex our mind, introducing "No one has seen God at any time." And we counter by asking: What are you saying, Theologian, disciple whom God inspired? You sow seeds of divine vision in the world, and yet on the contrary you immediately introduce God's invisibility? Was not the glory of God the Word, as of the Only-Begotten, seen by the faith-

ful, and, as you have borne witness, did He not allow Himself to be touched by our hands? How then can you preach rather that "God has not been seen by anyone at any time"? Who was it who, even before the advent of the Word in the flesh, appeared in many forms to the patriarchs and prophets? Who spoke to Moses from the bush? Or who was it that Isaiah saw above the Seraphim, Ezekiel above the Cherubim, and Daniel carrying a spear above the river of fire? What did your fellow disciple and evangelist Matthew mean to teach when he said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God," if no one has ever seen Him? But you, most studious, are the Evangelist of Thunder, and you cry out like thunder. Let Paul convince you, who cries out with me "Whom no man has seen nor can see."

Christ is God made visible

Well, then, we know clearly that it is shown by the holy Scriptures that the Divine is completely invisible by its own definition, insofar as it exists by nature in the one, holy, and august Trinity. Therefore even Christ's disciples reasonably used the impossible mode of (speaking of) this ineffable and incomprehensible nature in proclaiming it invisible; but straightway they introduced the awesome and exalted mystery of One of the same Trinity which took place for our sake by (divine) dispensation (οἰκονομία) out of love for humankind: and they brought this good news everywhere, that seeing God was quite true, and they made it plain that God's rule is more exact for all, according to the Saviour's saying to Philip, which did not lie, when He spoke to him prescriptively before His Passion, saying, "Have I been so long with you, and you have not known me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father"; and His calling Thomas when he did not believe in the Resurrection and encouraging him to touch His hands and His side, so that he, awestruck, exclaimed "My Lord and my God." And so we, guided in our minds by divine grace and by the apostles whom God chose, are rich enough ever to declare the most important teachings, namely, that God, insofar as He exists by nature and in truth, enables no creature to be fully satisfied and see Him completely. For how could even the Seraphim bear up under the most terrifying (vision)? They cover their faces, that cannot bear the irresistibility of the divine brilliance. It is fearsome, not . . . , but it cannot be seen by any created nature: yet it manifests itself to those who are purified at heart, not as it is, but

such as the beholders have capacity to see. And so in one way (God) spoke to Moses, and in another way was seen by Isaiah, and in yet others by Ezekiel and Daniel, not having Himself become different (God forbid!)—for “in Him there is no change or shadow of turning”—but joining Himself to the conditions of the beholders. So even God the Father thought it right to have known by certain people what the term for and the matter of His divinity are, and in the Law and the prophets He revealed Himself through visions and symbols (αἰνύματα). And He even by the same means pointed to His Only-Begotten Son and the Holy Spirit, but not openly, since human nature was not capable of (receiving) the plain revelation of the one being and divinity of the all-holy Trinity. God the Word, eternally existing in the bosom of the Father, and in these last days having become flesh, as the Gospel says, and dwelt among us, accepted that His glory, as of the Only-Begotten of the Father, should be seen even by human beings, and He gave us grace and truth, showing Himself equal to the Father by His God-befitting actions, and implanting in human minds divine knowledge of the invisible nature; and immediately He granted to everyone to believe “in one God, the Father Almighty,” and in Himself, “one Lord Jesus Christ,” and in the Holy Spirit, the three being one God, not differentiated by natures (φύσεις) or beings (essences) (οὐσίαις) (wherefore it would be impious to confess three gods), but rather by substances (hypostases, ὑποστάσεις) or persons (προσώποις) united into one being, one divinity, one glory, one kingship.

Christological definition

For after His glorious Resurrection He said to the disciples, “Go forth and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” He did not teach them to understand (that there was) thereby an addition to the Trinity by means of the Incarnation (ἐνανθρώπησις): rather He was divinely showing that He Himself was one Son and Lord after taking on, from us and for our sake, ensouled flesh, which was itself already truly divinized for the dwelling of the Word in it; even if what is unconfused (τὸ ἀσύγχυτον) is ineffably saved in Him for our sake, it is this that is the differentiation of things that are inseparably hypostatically united, namely, the divinity and the humanity. And in every respect it is constituted as not subject to either numbering or division.

Heretical Christologies

So they would be self-condemned who claim that He existed in two natures after the ineffable union. For this accrues a fourth number to the holy Trinity, and debases the value of the salvific Passion which He willingly accepted for our sake, and alienates God the Incarnate Word Himself from His voluntary and sinless sufferings, juxtaposing disparate things in the flesh alone and in a mere human being.

Others, of the other godless party, lying under the same condemnation and having the equivalent error though it is put in different words, dare to say that as a result of the same union the Lord's body was impassible, and in every way incorruptible: and by this (mere) appearance and illusion (φαντασία) they make a monstrous story (τερατολογοῦντες) the awesome mystery of our salvation. Who of the pious then would not be pained hearing the most discordant opinion of both sides? Who would not introduce (the idea that) this is harmful to the soul's well-being to those who receive it uncritically? But we, to demonstrate the disease in their theology, will make use of the sayings of the Fathers, producing evidence from them in each case of what combats against those (others) and shoots them down and shows that they are weaker, and equips us, the single-hearted, better for uprightness, and ever keeps us stronger on its side.

Patristic proofs

So let the chosen and most brilliant father among the first of holy men come out front now, Felix, who was most holy bishop of the holy church of the Romans, and tell us what he wrote in his letter to Maximus, the most holy bishop who thought the same as he, who was styled (bishop) of the renowned city of Alexandria, and to his clergy, with content as follows: “Concerning the Incarnation of the Word, and our faith: We believe in our Lord Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin Mary, that He is God's eternal Son and Word, and not a man assumed by God so as to be different from Him. For the Son of God did not put on a human being so as to be different from him, but rather, being God, He was perfect, and at the same time was incarnate a perfect man from the Virgin, being God *qua* unchangeable Mind and heavenly Word (for He is God's Word and Wisdom, and thus uncreated and divine); the same became man having joined Himself to human flesh from Mary. We believe in Christ Jesus, confessing Him to be God in

His divine nature, not by participation (μετοχή) in divinity: for He is the one who is divinely participated in (μετεχόμενος), having infused the Holy Spirit into the disciples; He himself suffering in His own flesh for our salvation and saving those who believe in Him from their sins.” And a little further on: “The Lord born of Mary is one, from Whom comes everything, as Paul says, and He is the Word of God, by Whom everything is, as John says.”

And we anathematize those who say that the divinity is passible, and those who say that the crucified Christ was just a man and not God in His entire person (ὑποστάσει, *substantiā*). But we believe that He is the true God, on the one hand suffering in the flesh, while on the other hand remaining without suffering in spirit, He Himself being Son of God and Son of Man in one person (μονοπροσώπως): for He is Only-Begotten *qua* Son of God, in Whom even we who believe are saved.

And Julius, the holy chief shepherd of the same apostolic see, in the same vein of thought gave nearly the equivalent to all in a letter written by him to Prosdocius, saying: “The Son of God is proclaimed, for the perfecting of the faith, as both incarnate of the Virgin Mary and having dwelt among men, not as having operated in a human being (for this is in accordance with the prophets and apostles), (but) perfect God in the flesh and perfect man in the spirit. There are not two sons, one truly-begotten God putting on a human being, the other a mortal man put on by God, but one: Only-Begotten in heaven, Only-Begotten on earth, God in His divine nature, man in His fleshly form (μορφώσει); according to His likeness saving the world through the partaking (μετάληψις) of His own Spirit, who is given by infusion (lit. insufflation): being God in human frame (σχήμα), the King of heaven and earth and the netherworld, glorified by all as the one and sole Lord into the glory of God our Father. But if someone says that Jesus Mary’s son is a man put on in addition (here from προσλαμβάνω, not simply ἀναλαμβάνω) by God, and unites two persons, let him know that he is a stranger to the true hope. For God the Word, through Whom everything came into being, is the same Jesus Himself, through Whom all things exist, as John and Paul taught, not saying that the Word put on Jesus born of Mary, but that He came into the world, having come into being out of a woman.”

Such, then, are the refutations of those who venerate two natures in the one Christ, two natures

which not at all correctly introduce two persons (πρόσωπα) for Him. They shy away from naming these persons explicitly, to the point where they are made fun of by everyone; but out of trickery and foolishness they are deceived into positing them, through their assertion (in addition to their other unfortunate expressions) of two natural properties (φυσικὰς ιδιότητας), thence thinking—those poor people!—that their hidden absurdity will escape the notice of those who understand divine teaching. For who would not clearly understand that “natural property” is substance (ὑπόστασις), that is, person (πρόσωπον)? Come now.

And concerning the Docetists who make the true mystery of Christ a phantom (ἰνδαλμα), we shall again demonstrate from the Fathers’ words that what they shamelessly say is impious and foreign to the truth, namely, that the Lord’s body became impassible and immortal as a result of the union itself. For the most wise, apostolic hierarch, Dionysius the Areopagite, who was the first to ascend the episcopal throne of Athens, says as follows in the Theological Instructions of the most holy Hierotheos: “Since He came from there out of love for humankind and in accordance with His nature, and truly came to exist, and was called a superdivine man (ἄνθρωπος ὑπέρθεος)—may what is beyond understanding and speech be praised by us—and even if in these conditions He remains high exalted and superessential, not only does He share with us without change and without confusion (here ἀναλλοιώτως and ἀσυγχύτως), not having suffered in regard to His surpassing fullness from the ineffable emptying (κένωσις), but, the newest thing of all, He remains highly exalted amidst what is natural to us, and amidst being He is above being, having from us everything that is ours, even more than we.”

And Athanasius the Great, who before us in apostolic fashion illuminated this very see, said, in his catechetical discourse about the bodily appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ, as follows: “What did the Lord have to do about this, or what end should there have been for the body, once the Word had come upon it? He could not *not* die, being mortal and offered to death on behalf of all, for which reason even the Saviour prepared it for Himself; nor could He remain dead, because He Himself was the temple of life. And so He died as a mortal, and returned to life through the life in Himself; and His deeds are the sign by which the resurrection is known.” And the same praiseworthy father,

again, in the third discourse of his book *On the Trinity* against the most impious Arians, relates these things: “Bodily things could not happen in a bodiless being, unless He took a corruptible and mortal body (for holy Mary, from whom the body was, was mortal). Therefore it is necessary that these things also, which are properties of the flesh, be attributed to the One Who suffered and cried and toiled, since He came into existence together with the body.”

And Cyril, the accurate teacher of principles, in the first book of his *Thesaurus* says thus in a simile (παράπλησώς): “For since He took a corruptible and mortal body that was also subject to sufferings of this kind, it is necessary to say that He, after (taking) flesh, made His own its sufferings as well, even while it itself bore them while He Himself remained the same. For thus we say that He was crucified and died with the flesh suffering this, not by a property (ἰδίᾳ) of the Word by itself.”

Exhortation

Well, then, these few brilliant proofs from the holy Fathers advise us to draw a straight line, treasuring up for another opportunity most of the things that they have studied for piety's sake. But you, lovers of the flawless faith, foster brothers and sisters (σύντροφοι) of the best way of life (πολιτεία), holy offshoots of the Church, be zealous as long as you live to preserve it unadulterated, keeping your mind alert and your intelligence awake, not to fall into the thorns of those who sow them from time to time, and to turn back their poisonous arrows: but intelligently to understand how they hold in contempt the upright teachings of the worthy Fathers which proclaim that Christ is one, and which direct (us) to confess His one incarnate nature and one person and one divine-human operation (θεανδρική ἐνέργεια) and one will (θέλησις); and also (to understand) how the apostolic traditions are despised, those which implant salvation from above for the whole human race, and do not teach us to make mention of “natural properties” (φυσικῶν ιδιοτήτων) in the one Christ, an invention of newfangled people who conduct themselves in an unholy fashion in the churches, crafty wordsmiths, not theologians (τεχνολογούντων οὐ θεολογούντων). The blessed Paul wrote about them, too, in his first epistle to Timothy, asserting as follows: “If someone teaches differently, and does not come near to the healthful words of our Lord Jesus Christ and teaching in keeping with piety, he is deluded, not understanding, but

making himself ill over questions and verbal fighting, from which come envy, strife, evil speaking, suspicions, and a bad waste of time on the part of those who have ruined their minds and been robbed of the truth, who think that making money is piety.” And, in a word, the wisdom of the world has done very well to reject the boast of the mystery of Christ, and it treats as of no effect His death, which through His Cross has become life-giving for us, thinking not to value it as something divine but rather to despise it. I think that the prophetically uttered saying has justly overtaken those who are sick in this way: “Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and understanding in their own regard.” They are not so beloved by us! But with all free speech and everywhere may those good and pure teachings of the theologian Fathers be spoken, teachings which overthrow the phalanx of the evil-named heretics, I mean the Chalcedonian perversion and the Manichaean insanity of the Docetists, and which edify the holy churches with healthful instruction, according to which the Son and Word of God, being one both before and after the (taking of) flesh, is together confessed and together worshiped as equal and consubstantial with the Father, and the Holy Spirit is numbered with them and adored with them.

And we are bound together with them all (the Fathers) also in the practice of the other virtues, so we may piously reap the fruits of its reward in due time. We shall imitate those who received the five and the two talents: let us take good care of the two, so as also to put our trust in the five: let us manage the five well, so as to be found worthy of still more. We shall abstain from drink, we shall do good works, we shall give thanks to God: for it is the acceptable time, the day for every good work leading to salvation. By good works we shall attract God's mercy, now most of all beseeching Him and making propitiation before His face: (for) since we see that the whole world is beset with misfortunes one on top of another and is running the risk of coming to the end-time which will destroy all things, on account of our many sins up to now, though we are in distress night and day, after singing let us cry to Him: “Lord, let your mercies speedily prevent us, for we have indeed become destitute: help us, O God our Saviour.” And equally may He be patient in bearing with our fallings away (παραπτώμασιν), and turn His mercies toward us, and gentle the hearts of those who oppress us (καταδυναστευόντων), and abate the disturbing storms that lower over us, and break in

pieces our sufferings at the hands of the mob. And we earnestly entreat Him to give the bond of love and peace to the Church. He himself asks nothing from us, for we have nothing of our own: what He has given, that He seeks. Let us not appear as people who default on a debt to God: we have received a little or a surplus, so let us do that work, not burying the (talent) given but scattering it broadcast to the poor, which is sowing seed in the stomachs of the poor ("He spent abundantly," says the Scripture; "he gave to the poor: his righteousness endures for ever").

The date of Easter

Let us sanctify our own bodies with fasts, calming them with sleeping on the ground, and mortify the flesh with other customary chastisements, and not be altogether enslaved to pleasures of beastly type. And thus cleansing our souls by continence and making them in advance stronger than our emotional appetites, let us fast a pure fast before the Lord, so as to lead a tranquil and quiet life. So let us begin the holy forty days' period of fasting, which is of eight weeks, from the 26th of the Egyptian month of Mecheir, according to the Romans ten days before the Kalends of March, which is February 20; and begin the week of the salvific Pascha from the 15th of the Egyptian month of Pharmouthi, according to the Romans four days before the Ides of April, which is April 10; stopping the holy fast on the late evening of Saturday the 20th of the same Egyptian month of Pharmouthi, according to the Romans seventeen days before the Kalends of May, which is April 15. And let us keep the feast on the holy Sunday at dawn, the 21st of the same Egyptian month of Pharmouthi, according to the Romans sixteen days before the Kalends of May, which is April 16: connecting those (weeks) with the seven weeks of the holy Pentecost, in which, keeping spiritual (all-night) festival (πανηγυρίζοντες) and mystically perfecting our holy performances of sacred rites with unceasing psalms and hymns and odes, we will sing thanks for all to our great God, the Benefactor of our souls, Christ, our Savior and the King of the universe, having fasted the best fast before Him and being found worthy of His love of humankind through His life-giving death and blessed resurrection and glorious ascension into heaven. To Him is due glory, honor, and power, with His undefiled Father and the holy, life-giving and consubstantial Spirit, now and forever and unto the ages of ages, Amen. ✠

"Greet one another with a holy kiss." ✠

✠ I pray that your Christ-loving self, blessed with good spiritual children, may fare well in the Lord. ✠

Alexander II was consecrated to the Coptic patriarchate of Alexandria on 30 Pharmouthi, Diocletian year 420 = 25 April 705.¹⁸ He came to the patriarchate in the wake of a wave of persecution of the Christians initiated by al-Asbagh, son of the governor 'Abd al-Aziz ibn Marwan (himself son of an earlier caliph), who had died in unusual circumstances the previous week, on Easter Sunday, 19 April. Al-Asbagh was reputed to have pursued the policy of investigating Christian sources and texts¹⁹ for possible insults to Islam, and exacting extortionate taxes, including the first poll tax (*jizya*) on monks, as retribution. On Holy Saturday 705, the story is related by Alexander's biographer, al-Asbagh spat on an icon of the Virgin and Child at a Coptic monastery, with the words "Who is Christ that you should worship him as God?" and was struck dead the next day.²⁰ The atmosphere at the beginning of Alexander's reign was already tense, and it was to flare up into open conflict on

¹⁸ Evetts, p. 50.

¹⁹ Of interest is his having read to him "the Gospel (*injil*) in Arabic" and the "books of alchemy (*alkimia*)" (Evetts, p. 51), as well as the *artastikāt*, translated by Evetts as "the Festal Epistles." Since we are dealing here with a Festal Epistle by Alexander, this might be of importance, since those of his predecessor Simon I (A.D. 689–701) might already have been under scrutiny by the Moslem regime. This, however, is a mistranslation. The word *artastikāt* is obviously a garbled version of some Greek ecclesiastical technical term. It is written differently in nearly every ms.: *artasthāt* (emended by Seybold to *artasthāt*) in the Hamburg ms. (old recension) of A.D. 1266; *artaksāt* in Paris ms. 301/02 ("vulgate" recension, Seybold's CSCO text [Beirut-Paris-Leipzig, 1910], p. 143); *artasikā* in Paris ms. 4773; *artalsān* (!) in British Museum MS. Or. 1477. Clearly the copyists are getting further and further away from a form they no longer understand. The original must be from the Greek *τάξις*, and mean "liturgical books." The scribe meant to render *al-taksiyyāt*, "Ordines." It makes sense that what was under scrutiny was the Christian Gospel and liturgy. (I thank Prof. Irfan Shahid for investigating this point with me.) See also G. Graf, *Verzeichnis arabischer kirchlicher Termini*, 2nd ed. (Louvain, 1954), 74. Metathesis, such as here of *s/k*, is common on Arabic loanwords from Greek. Graf's lemma (*Verzeichnis*, p. 6) of *artstikā* = (ἐπιστολή) ἑορταστική, "Festal Letter," might seem to justify Evetts' translation, seeing that indeed the content of such documents would have been of interest to the regime. This, however, seems more forced than the reading and interpretation "liturgical books." The long *i* never appears in any of the Arabic versions of the word.

²⁰ Evetts, pp. 52–54, noticed by A. A. Vasiliev, "The Iconoclastic Edict of the Caliph Yazid II, A.D. 721," *DOP* 9–10 (1956), 23–47. We shall return to this important historical evidence below.

many subsequent occasions. It is the troubled situation in his own times, in which a Moslem governor could express open contempt for the doctrines (which undermined the theoretical foundations of the Moslem state) of the incarnation and divinity of Christ that were proclaimed in Christian images, that prompts Alexander to select the scriptural passages he does as points of departure for his discourse.

Alexander takes as the text of his sermon the apparent conundrum, "Is John the Evangelist contradicting himself?" Specifically, he is addressing the problem of the visibility of God, through the juxtaposition of the texts "we beheld his glory" (John 1:14) and "No man has seen God at any time" (John 1:18). Not only, he affirms, is God visible to us in the fullness of time in the incarnate Lord Jesus, God the Son, but even under the old dispensation the First Person of the Trinity, God the Father, made himself visible to people in Old Testament times, tempering himself to the capacity of the beholders. The Gospel writer, granted by his Lord the gift of convincing eloquence that turns the wisdom of this world upside down, does not contradict himself. God was not only visible under types and visions to the patriarchs and prophets, he was fully visible to ordinary people of the Greco-Roman world in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. The apostles saw the second Person of the Trinity, and were taught by him about the other two; there is no doubt that God, fully the fullness of God, is visible in Jesus Christ.

Why does this early eighth-century patriarch select the problem of the visibility of God? Clearly because he is responding to Moslem attacks on the Christian veneration of depictions of that visible God.²¹ The Moslem position, that the utterly transcendent, un-hypostasized god of monarchical monotheism was invisible and undepictable and hence that Christian images were rank idols, was certainly making itself outspokenly felt within the caliphate in the first quarter of the eighth century. In the *Life of Alexander* in the *History of the Patriarchs*, al-Asbagh's act of contempt for the public display of Christian doctrine and practice was not an isolated occurrence. Beginning in A.D. 709, the richly decorated churches of the Coptic community were stripped of their altar vessels of precious

metal,²² their marble revetments,²³ and their carved woodwork;²⁴ finally in 721 came the edict of Caliph Yazid II that crosses and images were to be everywhere destroyed.²⁵ It seems plain that Alexander is telling his flock, who are disturbed by the despoliation of their churches and troubled by accusations that they are wrong to think God could be seen or pictured, to hold fast to what they have always known to be right. The true God did really become incarnate, visible, and saving. To date this paschal letter to A.D. 724, in the wake of the caliph's edict that sought to eradicate the public display of visual forms proclaiming convictions antithetic to those of Islam, would make sense in the context of the times.

In order for this visible, depictable, fully divine Christ to be understood as fully incarnate and thus fully salvific, his incarnation must be understood aright. As the leader of the non-Chalcedonian Christendom of Egypt, Alexander must once again define Christ's person and nature. He singles out Chalcedonian Dyophysitism and Aphthartodocetism as the two extremes of error between which the understanding must steer a correct course. We learn from the *Life of Alexander* that people of both these positions had been causing trouble during his patriarchate. In the Delta cities and in monasteries of the Wadi Natrun itself, numerous Gaianites (Aphthartodocetists) were active, and the *Life* relates that Alexander reconciled them to his obedience.²⁶ It also tells the story of an Alexandrian deacon ("Onopes," clearly a nickname) who, during the reign of al-Walid (705–715), tried to bribe the Moslem governor to get himself made Chalcedonian patriarch. This action provoked a popular uprising, and the repentant Chalcedonian fled to Alexander and was received into his communion.²⁷ Thus both heresies condemned in the paschal letter were matters of timely concern.²⁸

Alexander defines Christ not only by specifying error but by himself spelling out the right position and underpinning his discourse with lengthy quotations from the Fathers. In his own exposition of

²¹ See S. H. Griffith, "Theodore Abū Qurrah's Arabic Tract on the Christian Practice of Venerating Images," *JAOS* 105 (1985), 53–73; I. Dick, *Théodore Abuqurra: Traité du culte des icônes* (= Patrimoine arabe chrétien 10; Junyeh 1986). An edition by S. H. Griffith is to appear in the CSCO.

²² Evetts, pp. 61–62.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 72–73.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 66–67.

²⁸ Also troublesome were people referred to as "some who do not believe in the faith of the Coptic Christians, and yet will not pray with the Muslims" (*ibid.*, p. 62). These were probably Chalcedonians; it is highly unlikely that they were leftover pagans.

Egyptian Monophysite Christology, the eighth-century patriarch stands in a long line of tradition. Many of his expressions have earlier parallels in the sixth-century Coptic synodical letter of Damian I, patriarch of Alexandria A.D. 577–607.²⁹ The scriptural ἐν τοῖς κόλποις ὧν αἰεὶ τοῦ πατρὸς (SS, p. 72) is, in Damian's refutation of all heresies

ΟΥΔΕ ΜΠΕΛΟ ΜΜΑΥ ΖΗΚΟΥΟΥΝΒ ΜΠΕΓΕΙΩΤ,
“nor did he depart from the bosom of his Father.”³⁰ Alexander's doxological “one *ousia*, one *theotes*, one *doxa*, one *basileia*” (SS, p. 72) and “one incarnate *physis* [Cyril's formula], one *hypostasis*, one *theandrike energeia*, one *thelesis*” (SS, p. 82) are prefaced by Damian:³¹

ΟΥΦΥΣΙΣ ΠΟΥΤΤΕ· ΑΥΩ ΟΥΑΡΧΗ [ΠΟΥΤ] ΤΕ·
[ΑΥΩ ΟΥΠΗ] ΤΕΡΟ ΠΟΥΤΤΕ· ΑΥΩ ΟΥΕΘΟΥ
ΠΟΥΤΠΕ· ΑΥΩ ΟΥΔΥΝΑΜΙΣ ΠΟΥΤΤΕ· ΑΥΩ
ΟΥΕΠΕΡΓΕΙΑ ΠΟΥΤΤΕ· ΑΥΩ ΟΥΔΜΑΖΤΕ ΠΟΥΤΠΕ·
ΑΥΩ ΟΥΟΥΩΦ ΠΟΥΤΠΕ· ΑΥΩ ΟΥΕΘΟΥΗ ΠΟΥΤΠΕ·
... ΟΥΦΥΣΙΣ ΠΟΥΤ ΜΠΗΟΥΤΕ ΠΛΟΓΟΣ
ΕΛΥΧΙ ΣΑΡΨ:

(it is) a single nature, a single rule, a single kingdom, a single glory, a single power, a single operation, a single dominion, a single will, a single knowledge . . . one nature of God the Word incarnate [lit. ‘that took flesh’].

Damian too condemned the Docetists, ΕΤΤΑΥΟ ΠΟΥΖΡΕ ΜΜΑΤΕ, “who preach a mere phantom,” “like Marcion, Valentinus, Mani, Eutyches”:³² just so does Alexander condemn “the Manichaean *phrenoblabeia* of the Docetists” (SS, p. 83), who by *phantasia* distort salvation into grotesquerie. Although Alexander does not explicitly name or quote his predecessor Damian, in distinction from those Fathers whom he does quote by name (“Pope Felix,” “Pope Julius,” “Dionysius the Areopagite,” Athanasius, Cyril), his exposition clearly stands in the same line of descent. This is all traditional theological language, but in both Coptic- and Greek-speaking Christian Egypt it goes back a long way.

²⁹The letter is preserved in Coptic, from a wall inscription, in W. E. Crum and H. E. Winlock, *The Monastery of Epiphanius*, II (New York, 1926), 148–52 (text), 332–37 (trans.) (hereafter *Epiphanius*). A different version in Syriac is transmitted by Michael the Syrian, *Chronique*, ed. J.-B. Chabot, II (Paris, 1901), 325–34 (trans.), 358–64 (text). On Damian and his epoch, see C. D. G. Müller, “Damian, Papst und Patriarch von Alexandrien,” *OC* 70 (1986), 118–42.

³⁰*Epiphanius*, 150.54.

³¹*Ibid.*, 149.28–30; 150.64–65. The latter passage repeats “and one *hypostasis* and one *prosopon* and one *energeia*.”

³²*Ibid.*, 151.102–3.

Both Alexander and Damian also deal carefully, if in passing, with the theology of another great Monophysite of the sixth century, John Philoponus. Alexander alludes to the late sixth-century Tritheist controversy in which Philoponus had been involved by warning his flock against differentiating the Persons of the Trinity *ousiais*, by essences/beings (SS, p. 72). The Godhead both of the Trinity and of Christ is so constituted as not to be subject to a numbering operation (SS, p. 73), that is, what we would call a one-to-one mapping of the integers onto it. Closer to the time of the actual controversy, Damian had condemned Philoponus by name ἸΩΣΑΝΝΗΣ ΠΕΓΡΑΜΜΑΤΙΚΟΣ and his ΖΑΖ ΠΟΥΣΙΑ, “many beings”), calling him “this blasphemous” (ΠΕΪΡΕ[ΥΧ]Ι ΟΥΑ).³³ “Numbering” is not an unfair description of Philoponus' reasoning in the *Arbiter* and *On the Whole and Its Parts*.³⁴ Unfortunately, it was to lead to his condemnation for what was interpreted as a proto-nominalist positing of three *ousiai* in the Trinity,³⁵ a fact which gave Moslem controversialists no little *Schadenfreude*.³⁶ It was important for Alexander in the eighth century to sidestep, if not openly confront, the Moslem imputation of *širk*, “associationism” or “polytheism,” to Christians.

In the outright defense of Coptic orthodox Christology, as well as Trinitarian thought, an allied aspect of this concept also comes into play in Alexander's paschal letter. The eighth-century patriarch enumerates the mistakes of the Dyophysites, especially their dividing Christ and making the Trinity into a Quaternity. Their worst error is the positing of two “natural properties,” φυσικαὶ ἰδιότητες, belonging to the two natures of Christ supposed to have persisted after the union. This of course refers to the formulation σφζομένης τῆς ἰδιότητος ἑκατέρας φύσεως, *salva proprietate utri-*

³³*Ibid.*, 149.19–20; 151.132.

³⁴See H. Chadwick. “Philoponus the Christian Theologian,” in R. Sorabji, ed., *Philoponus* (Ithaca, 1987), 50, cf. 53. Fragments of these two works, preserved in Syriac (ed. A. Šanda, *Opuscula monophysitica Ioannis Philoponi* [Beirut, 1930], nos. I and IV), are quoted in Greek by John Damascene (PG 94, cols. 744–54); see B. Kotter, ed., *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, IV (Berlin, 1982) 50–55. Quotations are also preserved in the Chalcedonian florilegium *Doctrina patrum de incarnatione verbi*, ed. F. Diekamp (Münster, 1907, repr. Münster, 1981), 272–83.

³⁵See R. Y. Ebied, A. van Roey, and L. R. Wickham, *Peter of Callinicum: Anti-Tritheist Dossier* (Louvain, 1981).

³⁶See M. Steinschneider, “Johannes Philoponus bei den Arabern,” *MASP*, ser. 7, 13.4 (1869), 152–76, cf. 220–24, 250–52; A. Abel, “La légende de Jean Philopon chez les Arabes,” in *Acta Orientalia Belgica* (Brussels, 1966 [article written 1941]), 251–80.

usque naturae, of the Definition of Chalcedon.³⁷ The Dyophysites fly in the face of Cyrillian clarity, going from bad to worse: since in Cyril's thought φύσις and ὑπόστασις can become interchangeable, to assert "properties that belong to natures"³⁸ is the beginning of a slippery slope that leads to two hypostases, two Christs. *Absit*. Here is where Alexander reveals the Coptic layer underneath his Greek. Ἰδιότης is calqued in Coptic by the qualitative of the verb **ⲱⲡ**, **ⲏⲡ**, "to count, number, ascribe to": the *property* that belongs to or is ascribed to something (e.g., a nature) is arrived at by a process of numbering.³⁹ And one cannot perform this operation upon God (παντὸς δὲ ἀριθμοῦ . . . ἔξω καθεστηκότα [sc. θεότης]: SS, p. 73). To Alexander, "natural properties" are just one more absurdity perpetrated by the *technologountes*—the *mutakallimun*.

It is interesting to see this writer, in the first quarter of the eighth century, using and emphasizing the terms μία θεανδρική ἐνέργεια and μία θέλησις (SS, p. 82) in his exposition of Christology. This study is not the place for a detailed history of the various controversies involving these terms which had so disturbed the course of seventh-century Christendom.⁴⁰ Suffice it to say that, in using these concepts, Alexander stands in the tradition of a long line of Monophysite discourse that goes right back to Severus of Antioch⁴¹ and indeed

to Cyril. Using the supposed near-apostolic authority of (ps.-) Dionysius the Areopagite,⁴² Syriac and Egyptian Christological thinkers had grasped the notion of a "single operation" and a "single will" further to express the fundamental insight that it is through the unity of Christ the God-Man that we are saved.⁴³ As the operational level of Christ's reality represents his essential reality,⁴⁴ so one saving operation of God Incarnate represents the fact that it is really God who truly saves. This prevents, as Alexander says, alienating (ἄλλοτριῶν) God from his own sufferings and debasing their value (παραχαράττειν) (SS, p. 73). Under the pressure of Moslem argument, Alexander feels it necessary to insist in time-honored and patristic terms on the Christian proclamation that we are saved by a God who became actually and effectually human, not a distant spirit who acts on people through prophetic messages and fate. As Alexander would not have been affected by the events of the Monoenergetist controversy, by imperial pronouncements or decisions at Constantinople after 641,⁴⁵ he is simply continuing in his own tradition.⁴⁶ He most likely obtained his patristic citations, authentic or not,⁴⁷ from a Monophysite florilegium in either Greek or Coptic of a type

³⁷Quoted from J. Alberigo et al., *Conciliorum oecumenicorum decreta*, 3rd ed. (Bologna, 1973), 86. Christ is to be understood (γνωριζόμενος) in two natures, qualified by the famous four adverbs. Of these four, Alexander concentrates on ἀσυγχύτως (his τὸ ἀσύγχυτον) and ἀτρέπτως, in Coptic Damian's **ⲡⲁⲧⲧⲱⲛⲉ ⲡⲁⲧⲧⲱⲛⲉ** (Epiphanius, 150.57, cf. 149.12; SS p. 73, cf. 79–80). Cf. L. S. B. MacCoull, "A Trinitarian Formula in Dioscorus of Aphroditon," *BSAC* 24 (1982), 103–10.

³⁸The phrase φυσικαὶ ἰδιότητες is indeed used from the Chalcedonian point of view by Sophronius of Jerusalem (PG 87, col. 3168A) and Theodore of Raithou (PG 91, col. 1497D), as well as by the Lateran Synod of A.D. 649 (ed. R. Riedinger, *ACO*, ser. 2.1 [Berlin, 1984], p. 374). For the non-Chalcedonian usage and understanding cf. J. Lebon, *Le monophysisme sévérien* (Louvain, 1909), 487–88. Compare Alexander's use of πάντα θεοπρεπῶς ἐνεργῶν (SS, p. 66) and θεοπρεπῶν ἔργων (SS, p. 72) for his expression of what appertains to the divine nature.

³⁹Compare G. Zoega, *Catalogus codicum copticorum manu scriptorum* (Rome, 1810, repr. Hildesheim, 1973), no. 163 (p. 272), a fragment of the acts of the council of Ephesus, where **ⲉⲧⲏⲡ ⲉⲧⲥⲁⲣⲓ** "ascribed to/reckoned the property of the flesh" translates *proprietas*/ἰδιότης (of the flesh).

⁴⁰See H.-G. Beck, *Kirche und theologische Literatur im byzantinischen Reich*, 2nd ed. (Munich, 1977), 430–47, and F. Winkelmann, "Die Quellen des monenergetisch-monotheletischen Streites," *Klio* 69 (1987), 515–59.

⁴¹Hence perhaps Batiffol's quickly applied label of "monophysisme Sévérien" (above, note 4). The phrase is of course that of the title of Lebon's classic monograph (above, note 38).

⁴²As in PG 3, col. 1072C. Severus asserted, in a Greek text, that the ancient fathers themselves had proclaimed one energy and one will (Mansi, X, 1117).

⁴³In R. Chesnut's words, "... the unity in Christ is of greater significance than the duality." By far the clearest exposition of the position being discussed is the section on Severus of Antioch in her masterly work *Three Monophysite Christologies* (Oxford, 1976), esp. pp. 29–34 on "operation" and 20–29 on "will" (the quotation at the beginning of this note is from p. 35). The terminology is quite clear as it is deployed in three different language families, Indo-European (Greek), Semitic (Syriac), and Hamitic (Coptic). Ἐνέργεια is calqued in Syriac by a feminine abstract noun from the root *bd*, "to do, to make"; likewise in Coptic, it comes out as **ⲉⲛⲉⲣⲉⲓⲁ**, literally "the business of doing work" (when the Greek loanword is not simply borrowed).

⁴⁴See Chesnut's brilliant treatment of the "iconic relationship" between the two levels in Christ: *Christologies*, pp. 34–36. Any introduction of a notional duality into Emmanuel the Saviour, Severus maintains, runs the risk of negating the reality of salvation. Cf. Lebon, *Monophysisme*, 458–66. It is this concept of iconic relationship that makes the Western concern with *communicatio idiomatum* largely irrelevant in Eastern thought.

⁴⁵Neither the *Ekthesis* of Heraclius (638) nor the *Typos* of Constant II (648) would have deterred an Egyptian from proclaiming his own point of view. Nor, a fortiori, would the efforts at union of the Chalcedonian patriarch Cyrus of Alexandria in the 630s have affected the tradition within which Alexander was writing.

⁴⁶As pointed out above, Damian in the 6th century wrote of "one operation and one will" (Epiphanius, 148.30).

⁴⁷Neither the letter attributed to Pope Felix nor that ascribed to Pope Julius is authentic, but both were cited by Cyril of Al-

of which we have no preserved example.⁴⁸ His acquisition of the pseudo-Dionysian phrase θεανδρική ἐνέργεια would have come via the same sort of transmission.

Both the θεανδρική ἐνέργεια problem and the letter of ps.-Pope Felix are mentioned by another predecessor of Alexander's in the see of Alexandria, in a fragmentary paschal letter in Greek attributed to the Coptic patriarch Benjamin I (626–665), preserved in a recently published Cologne papyrus.⁴⁹ Benjamin, eyewitness to the Arab conquest,⁵⁰ wrote theological works in both Coptic and Greek; to his Greek epistle may also be compared his (probably originally Coptic) paschal letter of A.D. 642, preserved in Ethiopic transmission.⁵¹ Column I, D line 8 of the Cologne text preserves only part of the word θεανδρικήν[(sc. ἐνέργειαν). A little more remains of the next section, in which Benjamin defends adherents of the one-nature Christology against the charge leveled by the dyophysites that they are Theopaschites,⁵² by citing Pope Felix's anathema of "those who say that the divinity is passible and mortal, and who say that the crucified Christ is (only) a man" (also cited by Alexander, below). From what remains of it, it appears that the main import of Benjamin's paschal letter of 663 was eucharistic, as the rest of the text describes the proper state of mind and soul for receiving communion. Yet even from these brief mentions it can be seen that the same problems

were being dealt with by Coptic patriarchs, whether they had been functioning under Moslem rule only a few years or nearly a century.

One further point relevant to the circumstances of Patriarch Alexander's own time is of interest in his citation from the letter attributed to Pope Felix. "We anathematize," says the text, "those who say that the crucified Christ was a (mere) man" (SS, p. 76). In the first quarter of the eighth century, Moslem controversialists were asserting precisely that. Alexander introduces his quotation from Felix, in a letter supposed to have been addressed to one of his own predecessors in the see of Alexandria, just after his condemnation of the Docetic views of the "Impassibilists." Obviously no one in the third-century world of Pope Felix I was thinking in such developed and sophisticated Christological terms as appear in the text cited. But in the eighth-century world of John Damascene, the problem was neither Docetism nor Theopaschism: it was Islam. It was a topos in Christian-Moslem controversy to show that Islam was a kind of Docetic heresy. The type passage is John Damascene's *Liber de haeresibus* 100.23 (ed. Kotter, IV, p. 61).⁵³ The Moslems claimed⁵⁴ that the Crucifixion was a piece of stage-managed trickery (κρατήσαντες [sc. the Jews] ἐσταύρωσαν τὴν σκιὰν αὐτοῦ [sc. Christ]), involving a mere human being (δοῦλον τοῦ θεοῦ). Whatever the actual genesis of the pseudo-Felix text may have been (perhaps in an anti-Nestorian context), Alexander had a good reason to reply to the Moslems in the same argument by which he refutes the Docetists of his time.

Moving toward the close of his paschal letter, Patriarch Alexander alludes to the sufferings of Egypt's Christians in his own time at the hands of their tyrannical (καταδυναστευόντων) Moslem overlords, sufferings so great that he interprets them apocalyptically, as signs of the approaching end of the world. The cosmos, he says, is afflicted

exandria and often used by later Monophysite writers (see SS, notes on pp. 75, 77). It is interesting that, in introducing the citation from the letter supposed to be by Pope Julius, Alexander applies the epithet "apostolic see" to Rome (SS, p. 77).

⁴⁸ An Arabic florilegium of this type, expressly said to be translated from the Coptic, containing the letters attributed to Felix and Julius, is preserved in cod. Vat. arab. 101; see A. Mai, *Scriptorum veterum nova collectio*, IV (Rome, 1831), 207–10, and J. S. Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, II (Rome, 1721), 133–40. See also G. Graf, "Unechte Zeugnisse römischer Päpste für den Monophysitismus im arabischen 'Bekenntnis der Väter'," *RQ* 36 (1928), 197–233.

⁴⁹ C. Römer in *P. Köln V* (Cologne, 1985), 215 (pp. 77–106, 322–26). Since Easter is designated as falling on 2 April, the letter is to be dated to A.D. 663, just over twenty years after the Arab conquest.

⁵⁰ See C. D. G. Müller, "Benjamin I., 38. Patriarch von Alexandrien," *Muséon* 69 (1956), 313–40.

⁵¹ C. D. G. Müller in AbhHeid (1968), 301–51, with the literature cited by Römer (above, note 49), pp. 84–85 with note 26.

⁵² Referring of course to the Monophysite addition to the Trisagion "who was crucified for us." Compare the Chalcedonian argument in Anastasius of Sinai, *Hodegos*, ed. Uthemann, p. 102, that the use of non-Greek languages causes their speakers to fall into the error of Theopaschism. Benjamin also cites the pseudo-Felix in his Ethiopic letter of 642 (Müller [note 51], 326f).

⁵³ See above, note 34. Scholarly opinion defends the authenticity of this passage; John Damascene must have had firsthand experience of Islam (Kotter, p. 7 with the literature cited in his note 13). Cf. T. F. X. Noble, "John Damascene and the History of the Iconoclastic Controversy," *Religion, Culture, and Society in the Early Middle Ages: Studies in Honor of Richard E. Sullivan* (Kalamazoo, Mich., 1987), 95–116. Compare also the anti-Moslem speech in the Life of the 9th-century Sicilian saint Elias the Younger, accusing Islam of being a tissue of heresies: καὶ τὰ πάθη φαντασία καὶ οὐκ ἀληθεία τοῦτον [sc. Χριστὸν] ὑποστήναι φάσκοντες, τὰ Βασιλείδους φρονεῖτε; G. Rossi Taibbi, *Vita di sant'Elia il Giovane* (Palermo, 1962), 34–5, 146–47. This is Basileides' "laughing savior" who substituted Simon of Cyrene for himself on the cross.

⁵⁴ Qur'an, Suras 2 and 4.

with one calamity (συμφορά) after another (SS, p. 84). From Alexander's Life in the *History of the Patriarchs* we may gather what some of these calamities may have been.

In May 705 Alexander had himself been held to ransom by the Moslem governor, 'Abdallah b. 'Abd al-Malik, against the payment of three thousand dinars by the Christian community. Giving his parole, Alexander was permitted to travel through the Delta cities soliciting the money.⁵⁵ Further extortions were perpetrated by the governor Kurrah b. Sharik (709–714), well known from the many papyrus documents from his financial archive.⁵⁶ Kurrah once more held Alexander for ransom, occasioning another begging trip, this time to Upper Egypt in quest of another three thousand dinars.⁵⁷ A further disaster followed in 715: plague and famine.⁵⁸ In 718 came violence, the branding of monks, and the despoliation of church revetments mentioned above,⁵⁹ followed by the enforcement of a policy of requiring *sigillia* or travel passes to identify Christian taxpayers by their *idiai* or places of origin.⁶⁰ After the accession of the caliph Hisham in 724, a respite may have been granted by the more lenient policies of the governor 'Ubaid Allah,⁶¹ but Alexander was not yet aware of it. After all, he remembered the doubling of the poll tax (*jizya*)⁶² and its imposition for

the first time on monks at about the time of his own consecration to the patriarchate.⁶³ When he quotes the Bible in this section of his letter, he quotes a verse of Psalm 78 (79), the context of which reads: "O God, the heathen are come into thine inheritance: thy holy temple have they defiled . . . We are become a reproach unto our neighbours, a scorn and derision to them that are round about us . . . Pour out thy wrath upon the heathen that have not known thee . . . Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is their God? Let him be known among the heathen in our sight . . ." (Ps. 78:1, 4, 6, 10). In 725/6, about a year and a half after the date suggested for this paschal letter, the desperate Copts revolted.⁶⁴ It was not the first time, and was not to be the last.

Patriarch Alexander was conscious of himself as the successor of illustrious men on the throne of Alexandria. He explicitly refers to Athanasius the Great as his predecessor ἀποστολικῶς⁶⁵ "upon this very see" (SS, p. 80). When he closes his paschal letter with the scriptural quotation "Greet one another with a holy kiss" (Rom. 16:16a; 2 Cor. 13:12; SS, p. 87), he must have been aware that this very quotation was Athanasius' favorite ending for his paschal letters.⁶⁶ Alexander, who also had suffered for the sake of his flock, is consciously following in the footsteps of Athanasius, the originator of the custom of the yearly paschal letter to all of Egypt.

The paschal letter of Patriarch Alexander II stands as an impressive testimony to the knowl-

⁵⁵ Evetts, pp. 55–56.

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 56–64. On the Kurrah archive see H. Cadell, "Nouveaux fragments de la correspondance de Kurrah ben Sharik," *Recherches de papyrologie* 4 (1967), 107–60; Y. Ragib in *JNES* 40 (1981), 173–87.

⁵⁷ Evetts, pp. 58–59.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 67: date given as Diocletian year 431, a 13th indiction.

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 68–69.

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 69–70. Papyrus documentation of such *sigillia* is well known: e.g., *P. Lond.* IV 1540, 1633, 1419.1328 ff. The Coptic petition CLT 3 records the request of 8th-century monks for such a travel permit. The Life of Alexander relates the sad story of a young man whose *sigillion* was eaten by a crocodile; Evetts, p. 70.

⁶¹ Evetts, pp. 74–75. See N. Abbott, "A New Papyrus and a Review of the Administration of 'Ubaid Allāh b. al-Ḥabḥāb," in G. Makdisi, ed., *Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honor of H. A. R. Gibb* (Cambridge, 1965), 21–35.

⁶² In addition to the standard research on the Islamic poll tax (D. C. Dennett, *Conversion and the Poll Tax in Early Islam* [Cambridge, 1950, repr. New York, 1973] is the classic work), its roots might be sought in more than one late Roman source in addition to the *laographia* of Roman Egypt. The root *j-z-y* means "compensation"; the tax was conceived of, not only as a headcount of the non-Moslem population (in 8th-century Greek papyri "poll tax" is rendered ἀνδρισμός), but also as a kind of compensation to the state for its "protection" of the *dhimmis*. The state has in essence suffered an injury to its body politic by having non-Moslems within it. For different conceptions of "compensation" in the Hellenistic law reflected in papyri, see R.

Taubenschlag, *The Law of Greco-Roman Egypt in the Light of the Papyri*, 2d ed. (Warsaw, 1955), 426, cf. 277. A "protected person" paying this tax is a dependent of the state as a whole, as a *mawla*^c (client) is the dependent of a patron; cf. P. Crone, *Roman, Provincial and Islamic Law* (Cambridge, 1987), 35–42, 77–88. The poll tax is not a wergeld, the equivalent of the "protected person's" buying his life from the state.

⁶³ Evetts, p. 51.

⁶⁴ Cf. L. S. B. MacCoull, "Sinai Icon B. 49: Egypt and Iconoclasm," 16. *Internationaler Byzantinistenkongress*, II.2 (Vienna, 1982), 407–14.

⁶⁵ Alexander consciously views patriarchs as the successors of the apostles, as seen in his graceful introductory passage (SS, pp. 67–68), where he praises Christ's humility in taking the second place to his own apostles in wonder-working, and describes the vocation of the apostles' successors as that of being φυτοϋργοὶ σωτηρίας for each succeeding generation. He may also have been aware of the new weight being placed upon the Arabic translation of "apostle," *rasūl*, in the context of Moslem polemic. Compare the protocol.

⁶⁶ For the Coptic, see L. Th. Lefort, *S. Athanase: Lettres festales et pastorales en copte*, CSCO 150–51 (Louvain, 1955), vol. 150, pp. 22, 44, 67.

edge, intelligibility, and vitality of Greek in Egypt nearly three generations after the Arab conquest. The history of the death of Greek in Egypt has not yet been written. It can and should be traced through documents: administrative documents such as bilingual papyri; literary documents such as the el-Moallaqa inscription,⁶⁷ the letter of Benjamin in *P. Köln* V 215, and the present letter; and liturgical documents such as hymns and saints' lives.⁶⁸ Greek did not vanish from the administrative and cultural life of Egypt the moment that the edict banning its use in the government chancery in 715 was promulgated. A complete list of all extant Greek/Arabic bilingual documents does not yet exist, though efforts have been made.⁶⁹ The major bilingual administrative documents need to be studied in depth: for example, the great trilingual (Arabic/Greek/Coptic) *homologia* of *APEL* III 167, and bilingual tax lists such as *PERF* 595 and 609, all dating to the first half of the eighth century. Purely Greek documentary papyri are attested until the 780s. Egypt very gradually de-Hellenized at different rates in different areas of cultural life. Hymns in very poorly construed Greek continued to be written by Copts up through the ninth century;⁷⁰ Greek antiphons, ver-

sicles and responses, and even troparia,⁷¹ continue fossilized in the Coptic Orthodox liturgy until the present day. By now it is clear that there was no ironclad equation between Greek-using = Chalcedonian and Coptic-using = Monophysite. Greek is thought to have lived on in the society of the nome towns, now become provincial capitals under the Arab-controlled administration.⁷² Our Berlin papyrus can take its place in this chain of evidence, as part of the story of the *Nachleben* of Greek in Egypt from 642 to 1956.

The paschal letter of Alexander is of importance for two reasons. First, it is an elaborate exposition of Egyptian Monophysite theology that is written, not in one of what are ordinarily labeled as the usual culture-carrying languages of the Monophysite churches (Syriac, Armenian, Coptic, Ethiopic), but in Greek. Second, it is a defense of the principle of icon veneration that is written, not, like the other principal iconodule texts, by a Chalcedonian (such as John Damascene in Greek or Theodore Abu Qurrah in Arabic), but by a non-Chalcedonian, the head of a Monophysite community. After eighty years, it deserves to be known in its historical context, for its content as well as for its appearance.⁷³

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⁶⁷See L. S. B. MacCoull, "Redating the Inscription of el-Moallaqa," *ZPE* 64 (1986), 230–35.

⁶⁸The famous B.M. ms. add. 37534, the Miracles of Sts. Cosmas and Damian from the monastery of St. Mercurius at Edfu, dated to the 11th century, may not have been produced in Egypt; its hand resembles those known from Palestine. I am grateful to Mr. Thomas Pattie of the British Library for the chance to inspect this ms. Similarly, the famous Vat. gr. 2200 of the *Doctrina Patrum* is apparently Hagiopolite, not, as had been thought by E. A. Lowe (*Scriptorium* 19 [1965], 15), Egyptian; L. Perria in *RSBN* 20–21 (1983–84), 25–68.

⁶⁹See K. A. Worp in *Aegyptus* 65 (1985), 107–15, in summary recapitulating earlier literature.

⁷⁰The many extant examples deserve to be collected and studied: e.g., P. Berol. 11763; *PSI* IX 1096; P.Vindob.Gr. 42377 (cf. MacCoull in *ZPE* 69 [1987], 291–92); Ryl 25–28, 35–37, 39, 53, and *P.Ryl.* III 466.

⁷¹I. Borsai in *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 14 (1972), 329–54; O. Burmester in *OCP* 2 (1936), 363–94.

⁷²R. S. Bagnall in *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 1 (1988), 200–201.

⁷³For help on various points I should like to thank Roger Bagnall, Monica Blanchard, Berenice Cavarra, Sidney Griffith, Ofer Livne, Irfan Shahîd, Lucas Siorvanes, Klaas Worp, and the anonymous reader for *DOP*; and, as always, Mirrit Boutros Ghali (Cant. 5:16; Isa. 19:2).

Papyri are cited according to J. F. Oates et al., *Checklist of Editions of Greek Papyri and Ostraca*³ (Atlanta, 1985), and A. A. Schiller, "A Checklist of Coptic Documents and Letters," *BASP* 13 (1976), 99–123.

Addendum: On the History of the Patriarchs, see now J. den Heijer, *Mawhûb ibn Manşûr ibn Mufarrîğ et l'historiographie copte-arabe: Etude sur la composition de l'Histoire des Patriarches d'Alexandrie*, CSCO Subsidia 83, Louvain, 1989. On the life of Alexander at al-Manhā (above, note 12), cf. *ibid.*, p. 98, with note 51, p. 122.